Washington, DC – The Elder Abuse Victims Act (HR 5352), introduced by Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), passed by a vote of 387-28, marking the first time legislation on elder abuse has made it through the House of Representatives in 17 years. By focusing funding on more effective law enforcement and prosecution of elder abuse, the bill aims to reduce the increasing rate of physical, emotional and financial harm, neglect and exploitation of the elderly, and ensures that perpetrators are properly punished. The National Research Council panel appointed to review the risk and prevalence of elder abuse estimates that between one and two million Americans age 65 or older have been victims of elder abuse; however this statistic is uncertain because definitions of elder abuse vary widely from state-to-state, and there are many imperfections in our national effort to adequately prevent, prosecute, and rehabilitate victims of this type of abuse. This bill identifies and addresses those imperfections. —

"We have a moral responsibility to address this alarming situation," said Congressman Sestak. "I have been struck by the horror stories I have heard while traveling in my District, including one case of a man with Alzheimer's who was beaten with a belt buckle. The more than $30 million authorized in this bill will be critical to identifying the extent of this problem and ensuring the necessary programs are created and supported to combat it."

"The importance of this bill relates to its emphasis on enhancing the capacities to prosecute cases of elder abuse which needs to be recognized for what it is—a crime against the person and the property of an elderly person," said Bob Blancato, National Coordinator of the non-partisan 564-member Elder Justice Coalition. Mr. Blancato hailed today's proceedings as "the most significant vote specifically on elder justice ever taken in the House."

One key provision of the legislation funds a comprehensive report to be completed during the next two years, which will include: a study of the laws and practices relating to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation; a proposed plan that explains objectives, priorities, policies and long-term plans for elder justice programs; and activities relating to prevention, detection, intervention, treatment, training, evaluation, and improvement of the elder justice system in the United States.

In addition, the bill institutes Victims Advocacy Grants to establish pilot programs on elder abuse for health care providers, employees of social and protective services, law enforcement personnel, fiduciaries, judges, court staff, and victim advocates. Other grants will be disbursed to local and state prosecutors and courts, as well as law enforcement personnel for training, technical assistance, policy development and multidisciplinary coordination. Finally, this

legislation creates Emergency Crisis Response Teams to offer victims immediate, short-term emergency services, including, but not limited to shelter, food, clothing, transportation, mental health screenings, legal services and job placement assistance.

"I appreciate the concern for this subject demonstrated by my colleagues in the House and look forward to the Act's successful passage into law," said Congressman Sestak. "However, our work does not end there. I will closely watch the implementation of this Act and await the findings of the comprehensive report."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.

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